

# 5 Steps to Engaging Employees

Employee engagement can be a force behind an individual's decision to act, or not to act. The elements that make up motivate and engage employees are generally complex and unique to each person. Ultimately, they may change over time.

Companies with highly engaged employees generally demonstrate a higher revenue growth when compared to their industry peers. Additionally, shifting an individual employee from low engagement to high engagement can improve employee performance by up to 20 percent and significantly reduce recruitment costs.

While understanding what inspires employees to remain interested in their work, invested in their employer, and performing at a high level within an organization often varies depending on whom is asked, these steps should assist employers in fostering employee motivation in their organization.

## Step 1: Develop a Human-Centered Work Environment

Organizations are often defined as social systems that consist of groups of individuals that work together to meet a set of agreed-upon objectives. Therefore, it is not surprising that a primary area of employee motivation has to do with the relationships that employees develop within the organization.

Human-centered work environments focus on building a culture that offers:

- Shared values;
- Individual opportunity;
- Employee involvement; and
- Open communication.

*Create a work culture that encourages collaboration.* When working in teams, motivated employees need to work with equally motivated co-workers. A successful team requires that each member feels like a valuable part of the team. Encouraging a culture of teamwork means recognizing and rewarding team effort in addition to individual effort.

*Train managers to manage.* In order to manage a team, those in supervisory roles must first understand the basic principles behind guiding others. Train employees to be supervisors and managers before placing them into management roles. Employers can do this by teaching them to COACH:

- **Communicate.** The best supervisors communicate the ground rules for the entire team as well as the individual, and communicate what each member can expect to receive in return.

- **Oversee.** Good supervisors encourage team members to work together, to resolve issues and to develop solutions by guiding their growth and offering them support.
- **Advise.** A good leader provides direction and guidance when individuals are faced with choices, and points out alternative ideas and different points of view so employees can make intelligent decisions.
- **Celebrate.** The best managers not only act as a coach, but they also act as a cheerleader and celebrate individual and team successes.
- **Help.** Good supervisors help the members of their team to learn, to grow and to be successful.

## **Step 2: Develop a Work Environment Built on Shared Values**

Motivated employees thrive in an environment that reinforces their most deeply held values. Therefore, employee motivation stems from not only hiring employees who share the employer's values, but also in the development of a work culture that links the organization's values and guiding principles with its policies, procedures and practices. These policies, procedures and practices include, but are not limited to:

- Staffing and hiring;
- Compensation and benefits;
- Performance management;
- Training and development;
- Rewards and recognition; and
- Diversity and inclusiveness.

*Build an environment of trust, respect and credibility.* Building a work environment that is respectful, even-handed and unbiased in its treatment of employees creates an atmosphere of trust and credibility, which are important components in motivation. Without trust, respect and credibility, employees feel a sense of uncertainty, insecurity and worry that creates a barrier to effective performance and motivation.

## **Step 3: Create a Work Environment That Offers Each Employee Opportunity**

The general dictionary definition of opportunity is "a chance, especially one that offers some kind of advantage." For employees, opportunity may mean one or more things, including:

- Training and education, including on-the-job training, in-house development, certification programs and degree completion;

- Career growth and advancement, including promotional opportunities, job expansion, special projects and cross training;
- Meaningful work, both on the job and through time off to engage in community service;
- Work-life balance through job sharing, telecommuting, flexitime, compressed work weeks and other alternative work schedules; and
- Personal responsibility such as autonomy, accountability, independent decision-making and individual goal definition.

*Ask employees what opportunities they want.* When employers assume they know what their employees want, they risk implementing organization-wide programs that do not fit with the goals and needs of all team members. By asking employees what they want, employers can better identify the best motivational opportunities while creating a positive environment merely for having asked.

*Design individualized opportunity plans.* The best way to foster employee motivation is to offer employees opportunities that fulfill their personal interests and goals. However, it is essential to ensure that the opportunities fit within the framework of the employer's needs and guidelines. Additionally, employers should establish a performance development plan that allows them to track the successful accomplishment of each employee's goal.

## **Step 4: Involve Employees in the Business**

Employees are happiest when they have purpose and a vested interest in the success of the organization.

*Allow employees to contribute ideas and make suggestions.* Encourage employees to contribute work-related ideas. Some of the best suggestions have come not from initial brainstorming ideas, but from the follow-up discussion.

*Ask employees for their input and feedback.* Allowing employees to offer opinions, particularly when the final decision affects them, develops good will. Whenever employers seek ideas, suggestions, input or feedback from employees, they should:

- Set clear expectations of the outcome, including that not every recommendation will be implemented;
- Gather additional clarifying details;
- Listen without bias - do not automatically discount what the employee has to say;
- Establish a time frame for reviewing the input; and
- Report back with a final outcome or response.

*Encourage employees to participate in the decision-making process.* By making employees part of the decision-making process, instead of just the recipients of

decisions, they are more likely to feel they have contributed to the daily operations and overall success of the organization. When employees feel invested in the organization, their performance, productivity and motivation improves.

## **Step 5: Communicate Regularly and Effectively With Employees**

Communication is as vital to motivating employees as gasoline is in keeping a car's engine running. However, it is not about talking heads. Communication is a two-way street. As interested as employees are in hearing from the leaders of the organization, it is equally important that they are listened to by the leaders as well.

*Communicate about the business.* Everyone likes to be in the know. That includes having sufficient information on topics that have an impact on the employees' ability to perform their duties and to make work-related decisions. To keep employees apprised of vital information about the business:

- Regularly communicate regarding updates to things such as deadlines, customer feedback, product information, training opportunities and new reporting relationships;
- Hold routine one-on-one meetings with direct reports to troubleshoot issues, listen to concerns or ideas and provide feedback; and
- Encourage transparency by holding regular organization-wide meetings to discuss the state of the business and employer strategy.

*Communicate performance feedback.* Effective performance management is a year-round process that must take place on a daily basis, not just during an annual review meeting. To effectively facilitate the process, supervisors should:

- Encourage employees to participate in setting and meeting reachable objectives;
- Visit with employees throughout the year to check on their progress;
- Provide clear, specific feedback in order to reinforce the actions the employer wants to see or guidance on areas of needed improvement; and
- Reward and recognize employees who meet or exceed the organization's expectations of top-notch performance.

*Communicate to maintain good relationships.* Communication with an immediate supervisor is a significant factor in an employee's motivation. Research shows that most supervisors believe that work satisfaction is all about the money. However, at least one study found that 50 percent of commitment and motivation is determined by the relationship employees have with their supervisors. To further this relationship, supervisors should:

- Practice good listening skills;

- Ask questions to elicit information and understanding;
- Encourage employees to make suggestions for improvements;
- Engage in management by walking around (MBWA), which is spending a significant amount of time wandering through the work area making informal visits with employees in order to keep a finger on the pulse of the work environment;
- Be open to hearing employee complaints even if they cannot be resolved to the employee's complete satisfaction; and
- Keep an open door policy to encourage employees to seek out their supervisor with legitimate concerns and questions.

*Communicate through actions.* There is a lot to be said about walking the talk - matching words to actions. When an organization establishes an environment that is built on defined values, employees at all levels should be expected to behave accordingly. Employers can establish expectations of behavior by insisting that all employees:

- Be held accountable for understanding organization values and performance expectations;
- Model the behavior they want to see in others;
- Follow work rules to encourage other employees to do the same; and
- Seek regular feedback regarding their own performance from their direct supervisor as well as their peers.